

HOME TEACHER'S QUALIFICATIONS

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## HOME TEACHERS' QUALIFICATIONS

By EVELYN C. MCKAY

IN 1938 A GROUP of representative executives of agencies for the blind met in New York to discuss common problems. One of the major questions which engaged their attention was that of standards of personnel for home teaching.

It was recognized that, with the rapidly rising standards for personnel in other fields of social work, and with the advent of the Federal government into the field of work with the blind through the passage of the Social Security Act, the time might soon come when the qualifications of home teachers of the blind would be subject to scrutiny. This would certainly happen if, as has been advocated, the Federal government should extend its activities to include assistance to the states in their programs of services to the blind.

Attention was called to what happened in England when, after the passage of the Blind Persons Act of 1920, the central government began to make financial grants to the local agencies for the blind and thereby acquired an interest in the standards of work maintained by the various beneficiary agencies. Home teaching of the blind had been carried on in England for more than seventy-five years, and there were more than two hundred blind home teachers employed in this work. Unfortunately, these blind home teachers were unable to meet the standards set by the central government, and they were gradually supplanted by seeing teachers with the necessary qualifications. As a result, the impression was given in certain quarters that blind teachers were inefficient, and today only a few blind home teachers remain in the field.

A more careful analysis of the situation, however, might show that the displaced home

teachers were unsatisfactory, not because of their blindness, but because of their lack of thorough training and preparation for their work. The executives at the New York conference felt that this was the case, and determined that any possibility of a similar course of events in the United States should be forestalled.

It has always been a cardinal principle of home teaching in America that the blind home teacher has certain advantages over the seeing teacher in gaining the confidence of the blind pupil and understanding his difficulties. This principle the conference group was determined to preserve. But blindness is not, in itself, sufficient to qualify the home teacher for her work. She must have, in addition, certain knowledge and certain skills in imparting that knowledge, both of which must be acquired since no one is born possessing them. Moreover, since her pupils have other problems which affect their ability to profit by instruction, the home teacher must be able to recognize these problems and should have skill in "the art of helping people out of trouble" so that she may render truly effective service.

With all of this in mind, the executives' conference undertook to analyze the work of the home teacher and to set up minimum qualifications which the new teacher, just entering the field, should have before engaging in this work.

To this end, they prepared the following statement:

In setting up standards for educational qualifications and including special preparation and personal attributes for two types of home teaching service, the conference assumes the follow-

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ing philosophy to represent a background of home teaching service:

That the home teacher aids blind persons to overcome their handicap and to develop their abilities to the utmost, as well as to find satisfactory outlets, economic, social, and emotional, in the community.

For the purpose of establishing standards, home teaching service has been divided into two classes:

- I. Home teaching in the nature of instruction.
  - II. Home teaching to which is added social case work.
- I. Recommended requirements for home teachers in the instructional group:
    1. Two years of college work;
    2. Background courses in social case work;
    3. Special courses in methods of teaching embossed print;
    4. A practical knowledge of household activities, such as cooking, sewing, laundry work, and cleaning;
    5. A demonstrated ability to impart knowledge to others;
    6. Attractive personality, good environmental background, mature judgment, emotional stability, neatness of appearance, tact, and poise.
  - II. Requirements for home teachers who are also social case workers:
    1. Senior Home Teacher and Social Case Worker:

Graduation from a school of social work approved by the American Association of Schools of Social Work, in addition to the requirements for home teachers in the instructional group.
    2. Junior Home Teacher and Social Case Worker:

Such social work training as is required for eligibility for Junior Membership in the American Association of Social Workers. Junior Home Teaching Case Workers should work under the supervision of professional case workers until they qualify for the Senior group.

It was recognized by the conference group that many of the home teachers now doing excellent work in the field do not have all these qualifications, and it was repeatedly stated that the establishment of these standards for beginning home teachers was in no way intended to affect the status of the experienced home teachers now employed. Their qualifications met the standards current when they began their work, and they have added to those qualifications by their years of experience.

The requirement of formal training in various subjects is really a way of passing on to future generations of home teachers the things that have been learned in forty years of pioneer home teaching experience. And where is the veteran home teacher who would wish a novice of today to make the same mistakes that she herself made in her earlier days? Or who would not herself have welcomed training which would have prevented those mistakes if it had been available to her then? All honor to the pioneers who, by their devoted service won through the obstacles confronting them so that we have today the benefits of their experience to pass on. It is on the skills and techniques they have discovered that the preparation of new teachers will depend—the training-course itself is only the vehicle by which such knowledge is transmitted.

By such means—through the preservation of the values of experience and their transmission to the home teachers of the future—it is hoped that the standard of qualifications for home teaching may be raised and this important professional field may be kept open to the blind teacher of the future. Without such recognition of the need for professional training there is danger that the blind teacher may find herself displaced, as has been the case in England, by the trained seeing teacher.

Nor is this demand for formal training purely arbitrary. Personnel standards in general social work are rising rapidly because it

has been demonstrated that the trained worker can render better service to her client than the untrained one. Standards in work with the blind must keep pace with stand-

ards in work with the seeing, or, as one worker put it, "We give the impression that the blind are an inferior class and an inferior sort of worker is good enough for them."

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